

# State to require new embassies to achieve 'green' certification

By **TIM KAUFFMAN**

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The State Department has reversed course and will require all new embassies built from this year forward to achieve environmental certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

State, which is in the midst of a 12-year effort to build 150 embassies, already follows the council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards in designing its facilities and for the past two years has registered all of its embassy compounds with the council. But until now, it hadn't followed through with the process needed to achieve certification because of concerns that doing so would take too long and distract contractors from completing the buildings.

However, a growing call from ambassadors and other embassy staff to be able to show off sustainable buildings persuaded the department to reconsider, said Richard Shinnick, acting director for the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, which manages the embassy program.

"Many of our posts are crying out for greener programs and greener buildings, for political and public

diplomacy reasons," Shinnick said in an interview from his Arlington, Va., office last week. "Our ambassadors are particularly attuned to this requirement and want to have the kind of energy-efficient buildings that we could showcase."

For the past four years, State has worked with the Green Building Council on getting LEED certification for its standard embassy design, the template that is used for building embassy compounds. With this certification, State could build certified embassies throughout the world without having to submit separate documentation for each facility.

The design it submitted for consideration qualified for only 16 of the 26 minimum points needed for basic LEED certification, said Donna McIntire, State's energy and sustainable design program manager. The department is in the process of gathering additional documentation and intends to resubmit the design.

In the meantime, however, the department will proceed on a parallel track and require all embassies completed in fiscal 2008 onward to achieve basic LEED certification. Thirty embassies in various stages of design and construction will be completed within the next two years.

On March 27, the department an-

nounced that the embassy compound completed last year in Panama City, Panama, had achieved basic LEED certification. The project incorporates many energy reduction and sustainable design strategies, including water conservation features that will cut in half the water used for irrigation and reduce drinking water consumption by 32 percent. Almost a third of the materials used in construction were produced within 500 miles of the embassy.

Panama is only the second embassy to achieve LEED certification. State sought and achieved certification for the embassy in Sophia, Bulgaria, completed in 2004, largely to validate that it is building environmentally friendly embassy complexes. LEED has since updated its standards twice, incorporating additional energy-efficiency mandates.

State officials don't believe requiring LEED certification will require much additional cost, since new embassies already are aligned with LEED standards and have been registering their buildings and in some



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**The U.S. Embassy complex in Panama City, Panama, has earned basic Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.**

cases submitting the required documents to the Green Building Council. The fee for certification, which will be an additional cost for these embassies, amounts to 2½ cents per square foot.

Completing the registration, documentation and certification requirements to get the LEED rating for the Panama embassy cost about \$35,000.

State also will be moving aggressively on another front to make energy-saving improvements to new and existing embassies through a type of share-in-savings contracting vehicle called energy savings performance contracts. The Energy Department has awarded blanket con-

tracts to certain energy and utility companies for these projects, in which companies pay for the upgrades upfront and are paid back through savings that result from the efficiencies.

Changes that took effect April 1 will make it easier for State to use the program for doing relatively simple projects overseas such as replacing air-conditioning systems or lighting.

Shinnick said the program couldn't come at a better time for embassies, many of which are struggling to pay utility bills because of the weakened U.S. dollar.

The bills "are directly eating our posts' budgets," he said. ■

## Embassy in Iraq cleared for occupancy

By **TIM KAUFFMAN**

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Defects to fire protection systems in the new U.S. embassy compound in Iraq have been corrected, clearing the way for the State Department to declare the building ready for occupancy, a department official said last week.

"All of the alarms work, the fire pumps work, the sprinklers work, the water supply is adequate," said Richard Shinnick, acting director of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, which manages the embassy program.

State officials had hoped to open the building in September, but contractors handling the construction failed to correct fire code violations and wiring problems. The State official overseeing the project certified the embassy in December as ready for operation, despite critical defects in the complex's fire protection systems

that had yet to be resolved.

Shinnick, who became acting bureau chief in January, dispatched a team of department employees to Iraq last month to oversee progress in fixing problems that had been identified by bureau inspectors in a February report. Shinnick credited the architects, engineers, attorneys and contracting officers on the team with dropping everything and going into the war zone, especially as insurgents intensified their attacks on the area toward the end of March.

"These people were out there and operating in the height of and in the direction of the fire and shelling of the Green Zone," Shinnick said.

Shinnick said he will prepare the certificate of occupancy this week for State's undersecretary of management to sign. Once signed, maintenance and operation of the embassy will be turned over PAE Government Services, the contractor that will assume day-to-day oversight of the complex.

Shinnick is scheduled to testify this week before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, which has been critical of the construction delays and apparent lack of project oversight. ■

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